The Fox And The Cannibal

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The Fox And The Cannibal

by HypodermicSally

Summary

Will is a nine-tailed-fox helplessly in love and Hannibal is an oblivious cannibal.
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The fox lunges at him.

His hand shoots out and grasps it by it's neck. It would be so easy for him to snap it's neck, just a quick tightening of his fingers-

He releases the fox. "I'm letting you go, little fox," he says, using its state of disorientation to quickly grasp the trap by the jaws.

Chapter 1

When Hannibal sees the small creature for the first time, he doesn't think it is going to survive the winter. It is a small thing, barely worth killing even for what little meat it has left on it's bones. It's fur is beautiful, soft and almost silver in the snow, though he thinks it could be because he has been staring at nothing but white all day and has gone partially blind.

When he bends down to look at it better, the fox snaps at him, all sharp fangs and furious eyes. It emits a series of yips that is probably supposed to be a deterrent. The loud series of noises merely annoys him. Its fur bristles and it bares its teeth at him, snapping at the air between them.

"I'm going to let you go," he announces to the fox for reasons that he doesn't quite know himself. It is hardly possible that the fox understands him.

The fox goes still, as if it is listening.

Hannibal crouches in front of the tiny animal and leans forward.

The fox lunges at him.

His hand shoots out and grasps it by it's neck. It would be so easy for him to snap it's neck, just a quick tightening of his fingers-

He releases the fox. "I'm to let you go, little fox," he says, using the foxes' state of disorientation to quickly grasp the trap by the jaws.

Hannibal's muscles tense as he pries the jaws of the trap open with a snap. The fox leaps out with it's hind legs. He opens it all the way until it clicks open and stays that way until the next hapless animal steps into it. He throws a few leaves on it and stands up, patting the leaves from his pants as he does.

Looking up, he is surprised to see that the fox is still there, staring at him. He gestures it away. He needs his trap for bigger things, things that could feed him and his sister. It is bad luck, his mother says, to harm the silver foxes in the forest near their homes. They've been there longer than their family, she says.

"Go away," he says in his mother tongue when the fox stays where it is and whines about it's hurt leg. It is not that injured. There is barely a few specks of blood on the snow, which is odd. The trap is designed for bigger creatures and has enough strength to break all the bones in it's little body.

It doesn't look injured, merely annoyed to have been trapped in the first place.

The little kit whimpers and looks at him with soulful eyes and for a moment, Hannibal things that the creature is trying to thank him. He wants to remind the fox that the trap is his and scolds himself for the whimsical thought. It is not a time for fanciful notions.

The Winter is coming and he is going to need a lot more food if they are to get through it.

The kit does not make a sound, but tries to follow him as he walks away.

"Go away," he repeats and turns to kick snow at it.

The fox huffs, and then disappears in the snow like it was never there to begin with.

Hannibal thinks it's just a trick of light. Snow-blindness. He trains his gaze towards the woods and treks towards the stream where he has set a net.

It is a good half hour before he reaches into the water and drags out the net. He knows he should let it sit longer. He has only set the trap a few days ago and it is unlikely to have caught anything.

His eyes widen at the sight. It is filled with fish, almost more than the net should be capable of capturing. He frowns and wonders if the fish in the stream are suicidal, then does not think to question his good luck further.

They will not go hungry tonight.

...

The second time Hannibal comes across the kit, it is in the middle of Winter. He is burying his sister - what's left of her - in the garden outside their home. She has always loved the forest.

She wouldn't want to be trapped within the castle grounds. There are many good memories for her there, but he does not think she will remember much beyond the terrible way she died. He does not want her spirit to be polluted by the way they have consumed her after her death.

The kit is as small as he remembers, but he can't be sure if it is the same creature he released from the trap. His vision is blurry with unshed tears. The kit does not come closer as he is burying his sister, but when he falls asleep on top of her grave, he thinks he can feel the kit's warm fur in his chest, trying to keep him from freezing.

He does not die that day. When he wakes, the kit is still there.

This fox has brown fur, but somehow, he knows it's the same fox.

"Go away," he says again and thinks the fox must be an idiot because he does not run. Instead, it manages to climb up his torso and curl itself around his neck like a scarf. It is very warm. "You have gotten fat," he says and thinks he feels the kit huff in response.

Hannibal thinks of all the things he could cook with it's meat. The kit licks his face and he decides he's not that hungry anyways. Perhaps it will do well as an emergency food supply.

He brings it into his home and lets it curl in his chest when he sleeps. In the morning, it scurries into the forest the moment he opens the door. Hannibal regrets not killing it when he

had the chance. He will kill it when it returns.

In the evening, the fox appears at the door after Hannibal has returned from another day of empty nets and trampled traps.

It looks at him, and then it regurgitates what appears to be mashed berries in front of Hannibal, and then looks back at him expectantly, it's gaze inviting and proud all at once. It stays at the mat for a long moment, glancing between the regurgitated mess and Hannibal. It grows more and more annoyed as Hannibal continues to stare at it in confusion.

Hannibal thinks he sees the fox roll it's eyes, and then, it bends a little to lap up the vomit. Then, it looks back up at Hannibal expectantly, it's little eyes shinning with hope that Hannibal understands what it's trying to do.

Hannibal laughs, really laughs for the first time in many months. "This is vile, little fox. I won't eat your vomit," he says after he finishes laughing.

He does not kill the fox that day. Or the next. Or even the day after that. The fox has stashes of berries that it has been guiding Hannibal to and it is better at catching fish with it's tiny jaws than he is.

He will never admit it, but the fox is, perhaps, the only reason why he has not starved to death when his uncle comes for him a year later.

...

"We cannot bring the fox with us," he says. It is hard enough already, he thinks, to smuggle the boy to France, let alone an animal. And he is quite certain that the fox around his nephew's neck will not respond well to being caged.

Hannibal stills and for one odd moment, the older man thinks that his nephew means to hurt him for even daring to suggest such a thing. The moment passes before he can fully capture it. Maybe it is a trick of the light. "Would you reconsider?" he demurs.

"Perhaps we can employ some services to have it delivered once we are in France," the older man relents, sensing that the little animal means more to Hannibal than he is willing to admit

"I could have him in the bag. He is quite tame," Hannibal lies. He knows the little fox would sooner chew his arm off then allow him to put it in a bag.

He shakes his head, already sensing the problem with that suggestion. If they get caught the fox will not be the only one who will not be able to make the trip.

Hannibal thinks for a long moment, then nods. He bends down and attempts to explain to the fox that he is leaving and it will have to learn how to survive on it's own now.

...

"Willful little thing, isn't it?" comments the man who claims to be his uncle.

Hannibal looks at the little fox and realizes for the first time that he has not given it a name. "Yes," he says finally and his tone is soft then, almost unfamiliar to himself. He sounds *fond*. There is a lump in his throat that he cannot swallow enough to get rid of. He kneels in front of the fox and holds him with a firm hand. "Will," he says. "Stay."

It is the only command that he has managed to drill into it's little head.

"Stay," he repeats.

"Time to go," says his uncle.

He turns and tells himself not to look back. He gets into the car with his uncle, the little fox waiting obediently for it's master to return. It's large ears perk at the sound of the car engine.

When it realizes that it is being left behind, it runs towards the gate and cries a high, shrill note. Hannibal turns around inside the car even though he's told himself not to. The little fox is running behind them. He knows with certainty that it will run itself to death before it gives up. His heart jumps to his throat.

"Stop the car," he says.

"No, Hannibal. We can't take it with us."

"Stop the car," Hannibal repeats, turning to his uncle and giving him his full attention for the first time since his uncle has stepped foot into the castle that has housed nobody except himself and the little fox for the past year. Hannibal does not bare his teeth, like he wants to. Nor does he take the knife from where he's hidden it in his shoe. His gaze is enough for now. His uncle realizes he should be afraid of his nephew, but he doesn't understand why.

He tells the driver to stop the car.

The fox, thinking its master has come back for it, barrels into Hannibal's chest the moment he opens the door. It is whining and purring, making many little yipping noises like it's trying to tell him so many things at once.

Hannibal steels himself. "I cannot take you with me, Will," he says, pulling the fox from his chest. He brings it to his face so he can look into it's eyes. "Stay," he says. Then, in a bout of nostalgia, he says, "I am letting you go."

It's gaze is almost painful to bear and it makes another soft, keening sound. Hannibal makes himself look at the fox even though he wants nothing more than to look away and close his ears from the sound it's making. Will deserves that much.

"Thank you for your company, Will. I must leave you now," he puts the little fox down.

Will tries to scramble back towards him, but Hannibal catches him by the scruff of his neck. He throws Will as far as he can, knowing that Will is small and light enough to land on his feet.

Will yips as he lands, then charges right back towards Hannibal.

Hannibal closes his eyes and takes a deep breathe. He pushes back the fondness that he feels for the little fox and locks it in a precious part of his mind palace, where his sister is still alive and happy. When he opens his eyes, there is no familiarity in them for the little fox.

Will stops in front of Hannibal, confused by the coldness of his gaze. He keens and whimpers and makes sad, confused noises. He doesn't understand why he's being left behind. Hannibal knows how it feels, to be left behind and be alone.

He thinks for a moment that it would be more merciful to kill the fox. His uncle clears his throat behind him, trying to hurry him along without using his words. He needs his uncle to trust him. It would not do well for his uncle's first memory of him to be ruled by murder. He bends down and pins Will to the gravel by the neck.

Softly, so that the uncle does not hear him, he makes a promise he knows he cannot keep.

"I will come back for you."

He doesn't look back.

...

When Hannibal is old enough to go back to retrieve the little fox still waiting for him in his home, he does not go back. Foxes in the wild live for up to two to five years. He tells himself the fox has probably been claimed by age and ignores the pang in his frozen heart.

He plays with the fox in his mind palace. In it, the fox is happy and immortal.

He does not go back to the fox.

...

In the castle, Will waits for Hannibal to come back for him.

Search

Chapter Summary

Will looks for his missing cannibal.

Will waits and waits and waits.

Hannibal would not say he was coming back for him if he won't. He scrapes by with what little food he can scavenge around the area. He continues his training that the forests insists that he doesn't abandon. The forest do not care for his obsession with the human boy. They do not try to stop him either way. He works harder to learn about humans because of his relationship with the boy, and that curiousity is rewarded by him not dying as quickly as the rest of his kind.

Not that his kind isn't curious to begin with. Foxes are naturally curious. Nine-tailed foxes even more so. But Will has never fit in, even with his own kind. He's too patient, too serene, too reluctant to partake in the same games and tricks that the rest of his kind is obsessed with. In their free time, they put on a human suit and venture into society, playing tricks and games with people. It is probably also why most of them are dead.

In Will's free time, he wanders the forest and finds streams with the best fishes so he can lose himself in the calm flow of the water. He travels too. It is something odd that sets him apart from the others. He enjoys moving away from his nests. At first, he thinks it's just in his nature, because he wants to be safe. After a while, he learns to accept that it's because he's never comfortable staying in just one place for hundreds of years. He stayed in Japan until the bombing, and then he started moving West. He remembers South Korea fondly. China, not so much.

He was only meant to stop at Lithuania on the way to his next country. He has been without food for years when he accidentally stepped into the trap that the human has made. It is a painful trap. At first, he thinks he just needs to pry it apart with his paws. When that didn't work, he channels his magic and tries to use the buzzing magic in his veins to pull himself free.

The trap's intention is too strong for him to break in his state of near starvation. He considers taking the body of another but is generally just too lazy to do so. He sits and sulks, waiting for whatever hunter to come and collect him. It would be interesting, if nothing else.

He means to escape before the hunter sees him, but the human has soft steps that he did not anticipate. By the time Will realizes the human is there, it is too late for him to escape. He thinks it's not too bad of a way to die, if it means feeding the poor starved boy. He has beautiful brown eyes that seems to stare straight into his soul.

Will still has all nine of his tails and have lives to spare. Unlike his peers, who have wasted their years of training and many lives on trivial pursuits, Will still hangs onto all of his lives.

He lets Will go.

Will doesn't understand. The boy is obviously hungry. Will knows he doesn't have much meat on him, but surely it's enough for a meal. Maybe half a meal. It is the first time Will understood why his people wants to spend more time with humans. They are curious beings.

He stares at the human as he heads to the stream and runs ahead of the boy, reaching the stream where he's seen the boy's trap. He stuffs it full of fish.

The boy is a skinny little thing. Will doesn't think he will survive the Winter.

...

The second time he sees the boy, he is crying, though Will knows he will not admit it.

He is burying someone in Will's forest. Will wonders if he knows what he is doing, knows if he is offering Will a sacrifice in exchange for protection. Will doesn't particularly mind that the girl is dead already, or that parts of her are missing. He is not picky. It has been years since someone has offered Will anything. The boy's mother, who has older believes, used to bring him milk and small offerings. He has nothing now. He accepts the offering even though it is not meant for him. He will claim willful ignorance for that.

In exchange, he will stay with the boy and keep him safe. He will keep the boy from dying.

He means to keep the family safe, but Will doesn't understand bombs enough to save them from it. And the looters he tries to keep away by making a maze of the forest, but his magic is not infinite and he could not keep them away forever. The forest helps him with his quest until it grows bored of the game. Will is too tired to stay awake and keep them away longer. A part of him is curious of what would happen if they are found. He is, after all, a nine-tailed-fox and nine-tails are curiouser than most all beings in the universe.

He is horrified when they killed the girl, but is glad that the boy survives.

He has spent a little more time with foxes after the first encounter with the boy, hoping to learn more about being a fox. The forest thinks it is important that the boy does not know what he is and though Will seldom agrees with the forest on things, he agrees on this. He changes the color of his fur after realizing that silver is not a normal color for foxes and hides the rest of his eight tails. Apparently one is enough. That takes longer to get used to having just one tail than to the color change. He has gotten so comfortable with having all nine to balance himself.

He wraps himself around the boy's neck because it is warmest there, and still it is not warm enough. He wraps his magic around the boy, keeping the cold out so he does not freeze to death in the cold.

He will keep the boy safe. It will be his penance for not trying harder to keep the looters away.

The forest whispers to him about it when he returns to scavenge for food for the boy.

The boy is not good for you, it says. *Humans are why most of your kind are dead*.

Will ignores it, as he has done every time it tells him something he doesn't like. He had ignored it recently too, when it had told him to stay away from the castle and he had gotten trapped. Afterwards, it has said in that know-it-all tone:

I told you so.

The forest likes it when nothing changes, which is why it likes Will. Will is peaceful and boring, He is living without expectations and having a nice long life because of it. Will suspects it likes will also because there's nobody left who can hear it when it speaks.

You are obsessed.

Will has never been obsessed with anything in his life before. Except for the time when he started collecting rocks of various shapes and sizes and arranging it in a nice large circle. It was a fun hobby. He's done it for years and years. He ignores the forest when it tries to whisper more things in his ear and turns around to make sure the boy is keeping up. He is still too skinny.

Will yips and shows the boy to his best hiding place, where he's kept a collection of berries that he's deemed to be the most delicious.

"Thank you," the boy says and Will beams at him. Will is glad that the boy knows how to eat berries. He'd tried to make it easier for the boy by chewing the berries and digesting most of it first before regurgitating it for the boy, but he had laughed and rejected his gift. Humans are so stupid.

He watches the boy divide the berries and make sure they both have enough to eat. When the boy isn't watching, he sneaks a few of his own berries to him. A growing boy should eat more. He doesn't need that much food. He can survive on the magic in the air.

When they finish their meal, the boy smiles that cryptic smile of his and his eyes look less hungry when he gazes at Will. Sometimes, Will worries that the boy is going to eat him. He thinks he wouldn't mind too much, to be eaten by the boy. He would stay in him, with him, forever.

At night, they return to the castle and Will wraps himself and his magic around them both so that the boy does not suffer the cold. The boy has nightmares at night. He trashes and kicks in his sleep. Will nudges his nose to the boy's, waking him with the wet and cold. The boy wakes and holds Will, careful not to hurt him. The boy stays still and lets Will lick away his tears.

In the morning, Will lets him pretend he is the invincible young man he so desperately wants to be. When the weather is warm enough that he is certain the boy can take it, he herds to boy to the stream. It is harder to hunt for fish in the Winter, but Will tries to show him his tricks to get fish to jump out of the water.

It is mostly magic, so he's not too surprised when the boy is useless at it.

He climbs to the boy's neck and curls around him, letting him carry him back. The forest whispers vindictively, unhappy that Will is stepping out of the forest and back to the castle where it cannot reach him.

The boy will leave you.

He won't.

...

He does.

...

Will doesn't remember how he's survived on his own, without company... With only the forest to talk to him in that condescending tone he's grown to despise.

With every day that passes, Will grows more and more worried that something has happened to his boy. Perhaps the other humans are unkind to him. Perhaps the human who took him has been lying and he is not really his uncle. He doesn't know what to do except wait.

So he waits.

A month passes. And then, a year.

He has run out of food to eat in the castle months ago. He scavenges for things that are nearby, though there is not much for him. He survives on leaves and roots.

Another year passes.

He worries that his boy has died, but he knows, somehow, that he would be able to feel it if the boy has left him. He hasn't.

Two more years passes.

Will waits, sleeping most of his days and listening with all his being for some sort of sign that the boy will come back for him.

He waits until he can barely stand, until the magic in the castle is sucked dry and he needs to leave.

He is too heartbroken to cry.

The forest is happy to see him again. It welcomes Will back with open arms. He is starved. He has not eaten for the five years he has waited in the castle, thinking he does not want to be missed when Hannibal comes back for him. He promised. He promised he'll come back for him.

The forest does not ask him about the boy. It knows. It is just happy to have him back and shows him to the stream where fishes jump out of water in order to keep him from starving further. He is too tired to keep his magic up and his tails have returned. He is white again, as pure as the snow around him.

He curls his tails around himself and eats the fish. He doesn't how to live on his own, but he doesn't want to die either.

When he has gorged himself on too much fish, he finds a hole in the ground and hides in it for years and years. The forests keep him warm in the winter and cool in the summer, sending fruits rolling into the hole so he does not die in his misery.

It is kind to him.

It is years later, when he has finished feeling sorry for himself, that the forest whispers:

I told you so.

...

It is the wrong thing to say, because Will is stubborn and curious. He wonders what's kept the boy away for so long. The forest screeches at him when he leaves and finds the castle again. It is overgrown now, and even colder than he remembers. He realizes he shouldn't have left before it is clear that the boy has been there.

His scent is fresh!

Has the boy come back for him?

Will runs into the castle, looking through rooms to try and find the boy.

He does not find him.

Instead, there is a young woman in the castle. She is keeping guard of a man he recognizes as one of the looters he could not keep away from the boy all those years ago.

The woman, Chiyoh, gasps when she sees him. Perhaps she recognizes his kind. She asks if he is zenko, or yako in her mother tongue. Is he a good fox, or a malicious one?

He has not heard her language for years. He doesn't know if he wants to answer her, so he merely tilts his head and waits for her to share more.

"I cannot leave unless the man is dead. I cannot kill the man," she says.

He frowns. That is a curious dilemma. He wonders if there is a loophole he can use. He has not attempted magic for many, many years, but he has questions.

He understands why so many of his kind are dead by human hands. They have so many layers to them and makes him think of so many questions. He takes a leaf and places it on his head.

He takes her form because he has not thought of one for himself yet. The shadows of his tails are there even when he is human. He needs more practice.

She stumbles away from him in her fear and he is confused. Did she expect something else?

He asks a single question, the sound coming from his mouth not his, but hers: "Why?"

Her eyes widen. "Why?" she echoes.

"Why?"

"Why... what?"

He rolls his eyes and finds something interesting to do with his hands. He's never had fingers before. Hers are so... delicate. He doesn't like them. Maybe he should try being the man he has seen take away his boy next. Her gender is wrong for him. He cups his breasts and thinks he would prefer not having them.

"Kitsune?" she whispers.

She's asked him another question while he isn't paying attention. He smiles, a little embarrassed to have lost interest in her so quickly. He tries to remember his question. "You cannot leave if he is not dead. You cannot kill him," he echoes her words. "Why?"

She is still stunned, but knows the answer to the question so she answers him. "Because it is his punishment. I am guarding him."

That makes no sense to him. "Is this your punishment?" he asks in her voice. It must be unnerving for her to see a naked version of herself asking these questions. He makes a mental note to take a different form when he's talking to a human next time.

"I am guarding him," she says resolutely.

He shakes his head. It makes no sense to him and his curiousity is bated. He doesn't need to know everything. He wants to ask about the boy. He looks at her and opens his (her) mouth, but pauses. He is afraid of what he will hear. Is the boy dead?

No. He smells his scent. It is different, but it is him and it is fresh enough that he can smell it. He licks his lips and frowns a little. Why did he not wait for Will?

"The boy," he says. "Is the boy here?"

"What boy?" she asks.

"The boy in the castle," he says because it should be enough.

"There is no boy in the castle," she says with the same confidence earlier.

He feels his heart against his chest, beating so wildly that he's afraid it would escape him altogether. It is a peculiar feeling. He doesn't like it. "There is a boy!" he says, losing his temper a little. "I know he's there. The boy! Where's the boy! There is a little girl, but she is gone. And there's a boy who stays in the castle," he says, his voice rising with every word.

She frowns and there is comprehension dawning on her face. He sees instantly that she's trying to decide if she wants to tell him the truth.

"Set the man free in the forest. It will keep him there until he dies," he says, bargaining her freedom for the truth.

"Will he starve?" she asks.

He shakes his head, *her head*. The forest will want to keep the man alive for company. The forest remembers how hard Will has tried to keep the looters prisoner and will enjoy the challenge of keeping the man alive. The forest does not like it when things escape it. Perhaps it will not like Will when he escapes too. Will doesn't realize he has decided on leaving until he thinks that. He is leaving. He's going to find the boy.

"Why are you looking for Hannibal?" she asks, giving away the boy's name.

"Hannibal," he repeats the name in her voice and smiles. "Hannibal," he says again. It is a nice name. It rolls in his tongue pleasantly. "Is Hannibal here?" he asks even though he knows what the answer is. Perhaps he just wants to hear the name from his mouth again.

She shakes her head. "I don't know where Hannibal is," she says honestly.

Hannibal is alive.

Will abandons his human suit and leaves the woman before she has finished asking him questions. He is no longer curious about her. He wants to look for his boy.

The forest is not happy to hear that he is leaving Lithuania, but is a little pleased to hear that he has bargained a new toy for it. When it hears that he is going to find the boy, the skies go dark and there is an unfamiliar tension in the forest that makes it hard to breathe for him. He is surprised by the amount of care the forest seems to have for him. The spirits are usually impartial, neither caring nor helping anything but itself.

Perhaps there is less of his kind than he knows, if the forest is so keen on helping him. It has always been partial to those species that are going extinct.

No.

Will shakes his fur and keeps running through the forests. It is harder to find trees to run through, but every forest he runs into is telling him the same thing.

Stop.

Come back.

The boy is not good for you.

No.

Come back.

Will, please.

Come.

Stop.

He'll kill you.

...

He doesn't stop.

Chapter 3

The forest does not help Will find Hannibal, as he had hoped. No matter how much he begs or how many promises he makes, no matter how much he swears that he will be safe, it will not let him know where Hannibal has gone.

"Why?!" Will demands when he finishes his human form. It is still imperfect. His tail shows when he isn't paying full attention and he is very jittery for a human, prone to panic attacks and sweating too much. He thinks he has done a decent job, however. His hair is a mass of soft curls and he has made his eyes the same color of his favorite stream, where all the best fish are. He gives himself a slight tan because he think people with tans are taken more seriously. He likes being a man more than he likes being Chiyoh.

He thinks makes for a very convincing human.

Never one to be outdone, the forest takes the form of a giant, angry black stag.

"You look ridiculous," Will says to the stag after he finishes laughing. It is a very ridiculous looking stag. It is too big to be an actual stag, for one. But like all the things the forest does, there is a certain beauty and grace to it.

Stay, child.

Will shakes his head. "I want to know where my boy has gone," he says.

The boy will kill you.

He shakes his head again. "Hannibal won't hurt me," he says resolutely, certain of the fact.

...

He does.

...

Will puts on his human suit and goes out of the forest and tries his best to be human. It is harder than it looks.

Thankfully, there are names for all the ways he pretends to be human the wrong way.

Will thinks he kinds of hates psychologists. They see through his human disguise, but they diagnose him with a number of human ailments that makes it even harder for him to be human. Every time they pin another name for what he's suffering, he has to do his research and make sure he is behaving in the way that is expected.

He learns to ignore most people.

Most, not all.

Alana is the kindest person he knows. She is true and kind, and tries to do good by him. He likes her and wants good things to happen for her, but he's forgotten how to bless people with good luck, so he just trails close to her like a lost puppy and hopes she smiles at him more.

He thinks, in a different life, he would be able to be a person that she can be happy with, but he's too busy looking for his boy.

Working for law enforcement is a natural progression of things, really. After all, police officers look for people all the time and gets access to all sorts of information.

Unfortunately, the psychologist put a stop to that plan quickly. His human suit is too imperfect, too full of holes. He knows he shouldn't be upset by it, but he is. He thinks he's gotten better at the suit. Evidently, he still needs to work on it. He goes into teaching instead. It doesn't grant him as much access as being an FBI would, but it lets him get close enough that he can sneak into the database where they keep all the information and find his boy.

Unfortunately, things are never that easy for Will. For one, it is infuriating how many parents think it's fine to name their children 'Hannibal'. It is difficult to find him. He asks the forest again and again to tell him where his boy is, but the forest grumbles and darkens, beckoning him to return in all the ways it knows how.

He has to do this alone.

...

He has never stayed away from the forest for so long before. It is taking a toll on him. If he is completely honest with himself, he would admit that he is at his limit. His human suit is breaking at the seams. Psychologists call him 'unstable'. He knows he just need to go back to the forest, but he's too stubborn to quit now. He thinks maybe he has started looking at the wrong part of the world, but his nose is true. He picks up his boy's scent sometimes. It is infuriating, to pick up his scent in different parts of the town and yet be unable to track him down.

It is why he's settled in this particular part of the world so many years ago. It is part instinct, part the familiar scent that beckons to him. He doesn't want to give up. He knows he's close.

He just needs to wait. Will is very good at waiting.

...

He finds the boy when he least expects it, when he's not even looking. Jack finds him. Bless his violent soul.

The boy.

The boy has grown so *old.*

Will reminds himself that he has taken a long, long time to track the boy down. It is only natural that the boy has aged. He doesn't say anything at first, certain that the boy would

recognize him the moment he makes eye contact. But then, he looks up and locks eyes with Will, and the boy- the man.

He doesn't recognize Will.

Something painful clenches at his heart. Will reminds himself to breathe and not to do it too loudly.

Jack- Jack is talking about something. Will hears the tail end of the conversation and picks up the word 'tattlecrime.com.' He flinches. "Tasteless," he says without thinking. The woman insists on peeling apart his suit until there is nothing left of him.

"Do you have trouble with taste?" asks his boy- man? - and oh, he sounds so sophisticated and smart. He bets he's learned so many things while Will was gone. Maybe he could teach Will a few things now. They would be- *Oh, he's expecting an answer.*

"My thoughts are often not tasty," he says and then almost facepalms at how pretentious he sounds. Honestly, he's not trying to be a smartass.

"Nor mine. No effective barriers." Oh, his boy has gotten so pretentious with age! He almost smiles, but keeps his expression at a safe level of 'pissed off at the world in general'.

"I built forts."

"Associations come quickly."

"So do forts." Now he just sounds petty and defensive. He looks away, unhappy with how things are progressing. He wants- he wants his boy to like him again. *You left me*, he wants to say. *You told me to wait for you and then you left me alone*.

He can't look at him. He can't look at his boy without risking losing his human suit so he looks at everywhere but his face.

"Not fond of eye contact, are you?"

He looks up at that, unable to hold back any longer, wanting to see the boy, look him in the face, and Oh- He sees how much his boy has grown. He needs to change how he thinks of his boy now. He's gotten so *old.* "Eyes are distracting. You see too much, you don't see enough. And-" *Oh, is that white in his hair? Maybe he can fix it. He shouldn't have taken so long to find his boy. He should've gone after him right after his uncle took him.* "And it's hard to focus when you're thinking, um, "Oh, those whites are really white," or, "He must have hepatitis", or, "Oh, is that a burst veins?", so yeah, I try to avoid eyes whenever possible." *He can fix old age, he's certain of that. He can de-age him slowly so he doesn't notice. Give him a few of his years. He has plenty to spare.* "Jack?" he calls, trying to divert attention away from himself because his boy- oh god - his boy is smiling at him and he's so beautiful. Maybe he doesn't need to change anything about him. Hannibal is perfect just the way he is.

He pays attention because his boy is talking again and- *oh, god, his boy is a psychiatrist.*

A puzzle piece clicks in place and he suddenly knows why his boy is there. Jack called him there so he can find out what's wrong with him. "Whose profile are you working on?" he demands. "Whose profile is he working on?"

"I'm sorry, Will. Observing is what we do. I can't shut mine off any more than you can shut yours off."

I can shut mine off plenty well, Will thinks angrily. How dare he? How dare he do this! Will's come all this way for him and the first thing he does it take apart his human suit and tell him how horrible it is?! He resists the urge to snap at the boy - the man - *Hannibal*.

He storms out the room, his heart breaking more than a little.

His boy is an asshole.

Chapter 4

Once he has some time to think about it, Will calms down a lot.

The boy- Hannibal, his mind corrects hastily. Hannibal is older than him now, older than his human suit at least. He is older and there is something about him that scares the forest. Will can hear it calling for him even now, telling him to come home.

It is not safe for you out there, it says.

"I've found my boy," Will says haughtily in the general direction of the trees, hoping the forest will hear. "So you can stop whatever it is that you're doing to hide him from me."

The forest howls.

He slams the door in it's face and hides the call of the forest by surrounding himself with his companions.

"Come here, Winston," he beckons. The lovable furry dog wags its tail so hard Will worries it will one day propel itself into the sky and dives straight into his chest. The rest of his pack follows, burrowing him in a layer of fur and love that he doesn't want to part with.

...

The door rattles at it's hinges and Will laments the loss of his dogs to chase away strangers. Living away from his pack is always hard. He feels like there is something missing, something hurting. He misses everything about them, even Jack, who likes to dive into Will's personal space even when he sleeps. It's tendency to ignore Will's personal space even at their first meeting is how he named that particular stray, although he knows he will get into all sorts of trouble if Jack ever finds out Will's named a dog after him.

He crawls out of the bed and hides all nine of his tails. It is a miracle he still has all nine of them. Nine lives to spare. He should be stronger, now that he's found his boy. Instead, he is even more exhausted. Bags are under his eyes and he is finding it harder and harder to sleep without hearing the insistent call of the forest to:

Come back, Will.

Come home.

He opens the door wearing only worn t-shirt and a pair of boxers that probably has more than a few holes in it. Hannibal stares at him from the other side, looking like perfection personified. Will tries not to salivate.

"Good morning, Will. May I come in?"

This is a wonderful dream. Is he staying? Oh, but this is not his house. They're at a hotel, solving some case for Jack. Maybe Will could convince him to visit him at his home and trap him there. He'll take him back to Lithuania and they can move back into the castle, where it's just the two of them again. His mouth moves without consulting his brain. "Where's Crawford?"

"Deposed in court. The adventure will be yours and mine today."

He likes the sound of that. Just the two of them. *Maybe forever?* Will stands at the door and wonders how he can make that happen. He really should've thought of a plan beyond '*Find Hannibal*'. Now that he's found his boy, he has no idea what to do with him.

"May I come in?"

He steps aside to let him in, too tongue-tied for words.

Hannibal puts something on the table and Will's eyes widen when he realizes that he's brought him breakfast. Will almost beams at him. It reminds him so much of better times, when Will had brought Hannibal his meals.

"I am very careful about what I put in my body, which means I end up preparing most meals myself. A little protein scramble to start the day," he sets out the tupperware and hands a set to Will.

Will scraps the scrambled concoction onto a plate and digs in without waiting for Hannibal. His taste buds rejoice when the first bite reaches his mouth. He kind of wants to cry, but tells himself not to, in case it scares away the boy. "It's delicious. Thank you."

He eats the food too quickly, swallowing mouthful after mouthful so that he doesn't start crying. He's missed this so much. He opens his mouth, wanting to tell the boy how much he's missed him, how long he's waited for him to come get him, but then his taste buds pick up the sausage in the mix and he pauses.

It is not any meat he's tasted before, but he knows what it is the same way he knows that it's wrong. It knows it's not supposed to be on his plate the same way he knows not to go after an animal bigger than himself when he was smaller, the same way he knows which plants in the forest are poisonous and which are nourishing, which animals mean to attack and which just want to be his friend.

He suddenly understands why the forest has been so insistent that Will does not find his boy. He feels the hair on the back of his neck rising and has to struggle to keep his tails from bristling. He chews on the sausage swallows harshly. Is this his fault? Has he brought up his boy wrong somehow and broken something? Why is he hunting that kind of meat?

"My pleasure," his boy says, his eyes shining with something akin to amusement at the sight of Will enjoying the food.

He tries not to seethe and lunge at his boy to punch that smug smile off his face. Will wonders if it's cannibalism if he's not human. His human suit doesn't seem to mind what kind

of meat it is, however, digesting it easily. He keeps his eyes locked on the food to keep himself from betraying what he knows.

"I would apologize for my analytical ambush, but I know I will soon be apologizing again and you'll tire of that eventually, so I have to consider using apologies sparingly."

Will's mind is moving too rapidly to form a response. He's trying to figure out where he did something wrong. Was it his fault his boy is hunting human meat? Did he not teach him how to hunt properly? Was he confused? Even foxes don't eat human flesh, so it's not something he learned from Will. "Just keep it professional," he says, trying to think of how to breach the topic. Is this normal? All the humans he's met only eats animal flesh. He fed his boy berries and fish, for god's sake. No, he didn't learn this from Will. It's probably that 'uncle's fault. Fucking idiot took his boy away and raised him wrong.

"Of we could socialize like adults. God forbid we become friendly."

His mind sizzles and disintegrates a little. He wants to be friendly with Will. Is he interested in turning Will into a meal? He didn't mind being eaten by his boy all those years ago, when the only thing they had to eat were berries and the boy still insisted on giving Will his share. But now, now Will wonders if it is a better idea to return home and leave his boy altogether. No, not his boy. *Hannibal.* Hannibal is no longer that same boy he's kept close watch of all those years ago. What did Will expect? To come here and find his boy exactly as he's left him "I don't find you that interesting," he says, his heart breaking into a million pieces. He really wants to cry now.

Hannibal smiles. "You will."

He forces himself to finish the meal. It doesn't help that it is delicious. *Human meat*, Will thinks in dismay. He feels like running away and hiding. He wants to bury himself in a hole in the ground and wraps his tails around himself and wait for the forest to feed him again, like what it did so many years ago to keep him alive, when his heart broke for the first time.

"Agent Crawford tells me you have a knack for the monsters."

Will resist from looking up at him. Is his boy a monster now? "I don't think the Shrike killed that girl in the field," he says instead of answering. Talking about someone else is easier. It is a million times easier than trying to piece his broken heart together with Hannibal watching.

"The devil is in the details. What didn't your copycat do to the girl in the field? What gave it away?" He sounds almost pleased that Will manages to figure it out.

Will tries not to be suspicious. He answers with only half a mind. He's not really thinking about the poor dead girl in the field. He's thinking about his boy and how he can fix him.

"What kind of problems does he have?"

"He has a few," Will thinks bitterly. Will had been worried about how to fix his age when he should have been more worried about how to make his human not eat other humans.

"You ever have any problems, Will?"

He sounds so sincere too, when he says that. Will almost wants to trust that he's being truthful, but he knows he's not. Hannibal isn't his boy. His boy would never toy him like this. "No," he says.

"Of course you don't. You and I are just alike. Problem-free. Nothing about us to feel horrible about. You know, I think Uncle Jack sees you as a fragile little teacup. The finest China, used for only special guests."

Will looks at him like he's grown a second head. He sees such fascination in his eyes, devoted entirely to Will and he can't help but find that hilarious that his boy seems to believe his human suit so thoroughly that he's already analyzing him and finding him interesting. He laughs. All this time he's spent looking for the boy, he's never thought that he would find a cannibal, or that Hannibal would not know who he is and yet be completely enraptured with him. "What about you?" he asks. "How do you see me?" *Do you see me at all?*

"The mongoose I want under the house when the snakes slither by," Hannibal answers with a straight face.

Will smiles. A mongoose under his house. He could do that.

"Finish your breakfast."

So, his boy's turned out to be a cannibal. Maybe Will can learn to live with that.

Chapter 5

In all his life, Will has never taken another life before. He doesn't know if it's wrong, but he doesn't feel like it's right. Blood soaks his face and eyes. He sees Death beside the man.

"See? See?" asks the dying man, looking at Death. Death is a beautiful young woman, wearing a gown that is translucent. Her eyes are an ethereal grey that reflects the grey in Will's eyes. She smiles at Will the way one smiles at an old friend.

She glides towards Will and it is all Will can do to keep himself from collapsing completely under the weight of her gaze. She is very tall, towering over him even as she leans down, her gown falling open. She smiles at Will.

He stays frozen in place, his heart beating a hundred miles an hour.

Her hand reaches forward and she cups Will's face.

Will is instantly cold. He takes a shuddering inhale.

Hello again, Death intones with a kind smile that hides the desperate hunger within it. Death speaks to him the same way the forest does. The words wrap itself around him instead of going in through his ear canals. *I have missed you.*

Will ignores her. He has things to do. He presses his hand to the girl's neck, stopping blood from escaping her body. He tries to ignore the way Death's touch lingers on his skin even as she pulls back, disappointed that he does not react more happily to see her.

"See?" asks the dead man, his eyes wide. He is gazing at Death for the first time.

Somewhere in the back of his mind, Will knows it is not the first time he's seen Death. This is not his first brush with the proof of his mortality. One day, Death will come for him permanently . He doesn't know if he will go willingly then. For now, Death is not here for him.

Death rolls its eyes at the dying man. She waves her hand and banishes the dead man's soul to where it is supposed to go without turning to him. Her attention is completely on Will. *Would you like me to leave her? You have lives to spare.* It looks at all nine tails behind Will and it's hands reaches out, caressing one of his tails, coveting what it cannot have. Her hands wrap around the tail that Will knows others cannot see.

Will trembles. He doesn't know what to say, so he stays quiet.

Have you missed me, Will? You taken such good care of yourself without me.

Will doesn't answer her. Blood is coating his hands and he doesn't know if he's holding the fragile girl's neck right.

She leans towards him, moving her ethereal form between the corpse and Will so he has to look at her.

Why are you human, dear Will? You are so much more than that.

When he continues to ignore her, her voice takes a crueler tone, like she is not pleased at all that he is not paying attention to her.

You have lives to spare, Will. If you want her to live that badly, you should give me one of your tails.

Will opens his mouth. He didn't know he could bargain his life for another.

One of your tails in exchange for hers, Death murmurs, leaning forward until their foreheads are touching. *We can spend some time together as well... get to know each other again.* She is so very cold.

The terms are sound. He looks back at the girl dying beneath his hands. He can offer one of his lives for hers. He should do it. It is the right thing to do. He pauses, thinking deeply. He is reluctant to part with his tails. They have been with him for years and years. What if he needs them for later?

Hannibal steps into the room and Death makes a sound that is almost a groan, though she would never admit it. She takes great care in appearing ethereal and beautiful, but Will isn't looking at her now. He's looking at Hannibal. Hannibal, who seems to know exactly what to do.. Hannibal, who is staring at Will as if he is the most precious thing in the world, his expression frozen somewhere between awe and pure, visceral pleasure. Will knows for certain that something is terribly wrong with his boy.

Will is trembling and covered in someone else's blood and he's just killed a man. And yet, Hannibal is looking at him as if he is the most beautiful thing he's ever seen.

Then, Hannibal kneels in front of him and gently guides Wills hands away. Without saying a word, he helps Will hold death at bay, keeping the girl alive.

I'll see you again, my Will, Death murmurs, glaring at Hannibal as she slowly starts to fade away.

Will stumbles back, gasping for breath. His fingers are sleek with blood and he is creating smears of red on the floor as he scrambles away, but that is matter for the crime scene detectives later.

...

Will is sitting by the hospital bed much later when he tries to remember the lives he's lived. He knows it is not something he would have forgotten easily. He earns the rest of his tails after his brush with Death, which is peculiar because the most he's seen on other foxes like him is two. He is an outcast, even then, deemed too old and too odd to fit in. There must be something wrong with him, they think, to have that many tails. They stay away from him to

keep themselves safe even though Will doesn't understand why he's dangerous in the first place. He keeps to himself and doesn't make any trouble.

He does talk to the forests though, which is peculiar too because most foxes can only hear whispers. He has conversations with it. In fact, it is sad that the forests are the only constants in his life. Yet, it only insists on one thing.

Stay, Will, it says. *Stay.*

Will wonders, sometimes, if he really is a nine tailed fox. Other foxes do not think he is one of them. He doesn't think he's one of them, sometimes. He thinks he could be an anomaly, an entity created by mistake some time in the past and is simply forgotten.

He feels so very old sometimes, older than any being in the world. And then, a human teaches him about some new technology they've created and he feels like an infant learning to crawl for the first time.

Will doesn't remember much about his past. He's always assumed it is because there are so many years for him to remember.

He remembers them the same way a grown man remembers a childhood memory from before they've learned all the words for the things they've experienced. He remembers overwhelming curiosity about everything, and then, after his brush with death, he remembers losing that curiosity for centuries... until he meets his boy.

His memory is stored in bits and pieces with nothing solid to show for it except for all the years he's spent with his boy. It is as if he has just drifted through life without purpose.

The boy has changed everything for him. He has decided, all those years ago, to make his boy his purpose. Hannibal is his purpose.

Will stares at Hannibal in the hospital and wonders if he cares so much that there's something wrong with Hannibal. Does it really bother him that he's not like other humans? Maybe he should be proud. His boy has grown into a self-reliant and handsome cannibal.

He smiles a little at the thought.

...

Afterwards, on Jack's insistence that he is evaluated for his mental well-being, he appears in Hannibal's office and tries his best to touch everything and leave his scent on as many things as possible. He wants his entire office to smell like Will.

He is on his way to touch the two hundred and fiftieth book when Hannibal suddenly makes a noise. He gazes down at Hannibal, his curiousity piqued. "What's that?" he asks.

"Your psychological evaluation. You are totally functional and more or less sane. Well done."

Will resists the urge to grin at the praise. He wonders what he can do to make Hannibal compliment him again. He thinks of it as a victory when he does not jump down from the second floor to rub his scent all over his cannibal. He wonders if he should thank him. Instead, he says, "Did you just rubber stamp me?"

"Yes, Jack Crawford may lay his weary head to rest knowing he didn't break you and our conversation can proceed unobstructed by paperwork."

"Jack says that I need therapy." He injects just the right amount of disgust in his words to be believable.

"What you need is a way out of dark places when Jack sends you there."

Will wonders if Hannibal is offering to be his sanctuary, or be his guide into even darker places. His cannibal is a peculiar human being. He doesn't know if he should be proud, or horrified. He settles with being a little of both for now. "Last time he sent me into a dark place, I brought something back."

"A surrogate daughter? You saved Abigail Hobb's life. You also orphaned her. That comes with certain emotional obligations, regardless of empathy disorders."

Will is thinking about Death, but Abigail is probably important too, since she's alive. She's alive because Hannibal showed up on time. Will isn't sure if he is willing to give up one of his lives for a perfect stranger. Humans die all the time, after all. He tries to deflect responsibility and reminds Hannibal that he is there too. "Do you feel obligated?" he asks.

"Yes. I feel a staggering amount of obligation. I feel responsibility. I've fantasized about scenarios where my actions may have allowed a different fate for Abigail Hobbs."

Will resists the urge to gape at him in disbelief. The only truth in anything he's said is if the 'different fate' be death for Abigail Hobbs. "Jack thinks Abigail Hobbs helped her dad kill those girls," Will says instead. He has been doing a lot of that lately, thinking one thing and saying another. He wonders if it is something he picked up from Hannibal. He didn't used to be this cryptic.

"How does that make you feel?" Hannibal asks.

Will allows himself to roll his eyes this time. He repeats the question to Hannibal, but with more attitude.

"I find it vulgar," he says.

"Me too," Will responds, though he is probably willing to agree to anything Hannibal says.

"And entirely possible."

Maybe not everything. The girl is allowed her own secrets. She did she did to survive. It's the way of nature. "It's not what happened," he finds himself saying.

"Jack will ask her when she wakes up, or he'll have one of us to ask her."

Will wishes they can go back to talking about them instead of some girl. Is Hannibal in love with the girl? "Is this therapy, or a support group?" he asks, annoyed.

"It's whatever you need it to be."

Will preens.

"And, Will, the mirrors in your mind can reflect the best of yourself, not the worst of someone else."

Will frowns, not comprehending what he's saying. And then he remembers. *Oh! The empathy thing.* Will nods like Hannibal's delivered some sage advice to Will instead of another troublesome part of his human suit that he has to keep intact.

He doesn't make any progress into telling Hannibal who he is, which is a shame because he's really tired to his human suit. At the same time, he is immeasurably curious about what happened to his boy all this years to change him so much. He doesn't make much progress on that front either.

He does, however, manage to touch twenty five more things before taking his leave.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will is looking at... a sacrifice. It is not meant to be a sacrifice to the forest, but it is still one. The forest sings to Will when he returns to it, not knowing that his visit is only temporary, that he's only hear because of the corpses that some poor kids have found there.

He looks at the dead, arranged in a single straight file in the ground and channels the magic around him so he can see what happened to the man to bring him there.

"I do not bind his arms or legs are I bury him in a shallow grave," he says, channeling the spirit of the man who had done those deeds. "He's alive. But he will never be conscious again. He won't know that he's dying. I don't need him to. This is my design."

He resurfaces from the depth of his magic like a man coming up from the bottom of the sea for air. The corpse opens his eyes and stares at him.

The man's hands shoot up and grasps his own. Will stumbles back, wondering if it is another trick of the forest. If it's started using corpses to drag Will home now, but the people behind him are equally surprised. They see him too.

He's alive.

...

Jack looks at him half a dozen time through the rear view mirror. Will carefully avoids the man's eyes and focuses on looking more rattled by the fact that a corpse has reached out to him and touched his hand. It's not too hard. He's never had a body come back to life like that before.

"Are you alright, Will?" Jack asks, concern so thick in his voice that Will almost believes he's asking out of the goodness of his heart.

"Define, alright," he says sullenly and Jack flinches. He takes care not to look at Jack to betray his amusement. He's so worried about Will breaking. It's almost sweet. He sighs, taking pity on the man. "I'm fine, Jack. I just need coffee," he says, rubbing his eyes with the back of his hands. According to all the books he's read, all these trauma is supposed to make his condition worse.

"Maybe you should arrange another meeting with Dr. Lecter."

Will sits up straighter and his heart stutters with a warmth of joy at the suggestion. Then, he remembers he hates therapists and sags back in his seat. "I don't need to see a psychiatrist, Jack," he says and hates every word that comes out of his mouth. When Jack introduced Will to Hannibal, he skyrocketed to second place on Will's admitted short list of Best Humans

Ever, usurping dear, kind Alana, who is in third place now. It goes, Hannibal, Jack, and then Alana. Poor Alana. She should be in second place, but then apparently she's known Hannibal before Jack had and never bothered to introduce them! Bad Alana.

Jack proves himself worthy of that spot when he says, "I've already made a call. I'll drop you off to his office now."

Will grunts and doesn't argue in case he changes his mind. Inside, he is doing little happy circular laps around his tails. He's going to see his boy again! He chokes down his laugh with a cough.

Jack frowns at him. "Are you sure you're fine? Do you need to go to the hospital?"

"No!" Will chokes out instantly. "I'm fine," he corrects. And then, "Thanks, Jack." He can tell from the way Jack keeps glancing at him suspiciously that he doesn't believe Will, but he can't bring himself to care. He's going to see Hannibal again! He should probably think of the things he's going to say to his boy. There needs to be a valid reason for this visit. What does Jack think?

Will frowns. Jack thinks he's unstable. So does Hannibal, though he's much more curious and subtle about it. He remembers the forms that Jack has Hannibal sign and takes it with the rest of the files when Jack drops him off at Hannibal's office.

The door is unlocked, ready for him when he enters.

He throws the files on the desk without waiting for Hannibal to ask him what's wrong. "This may have been premature," he says, mostly because if the files aren't stamped, he will get to have more sessions with his cannibal. Hannibal... Cannibal... *Oh, god.* His boy is playing a pun on his name! Is his boy a fucking idiot? He resists the urge to smack his boy over the head with the files.

"What did you see?" he asks.

Will doesn't remember what they're talking about, so he refers to the last thing he's supposed to be traumatized by. "Hobbs," he responds without thinking.

"An association?"

"A hallucination." He needs to stop talking. He's improvising and adding more and more symptoms that he does not have. "I saw him," his mouth speaks without permission. "I saw him lying there in someone else's grave." Why is he saying these things?

Instead of looking worried, his boy looks intrigued. He almost looks as though he's having fun. "Did you tell Jack what you saw?"

"No!" he snarls and then turns away so he can hide his teeth and his tails before he sees them.

"It's stress," Hannibal says, dismissing him easily.

He resists the urge to gape at him. His boy is a terrible psychologist. He should really consider another career option. Will sighs. He feels like he's been talking to his boy for hours and all they ever talk about is other people and that weird mushroom guy and his obsession with connecting to people... intimately.

They part after talking about everything and nothing. Will is thoroughly exhausted, but he's also managed to leave his scent on that ugly sculpture Hannibal has on his desk and a dozen other books, so it's not a complete waste of time. The things he touched the last time still smells like him, so he doesn't need to touch them again. He smiles a little as he heads home.

...

Alana is so nice. Will wants to hug her when he wakes up and sees her reading to that poor girl that Hannibal seems to be obsessed with. All the good will he feels for the girl disintegrates when he remembers how much Hannibal wanted to talk about her. "You could be reading to a killer," he says bitterly, hoping Alana isn't going to join Hannibal and be obsessed with her too.

"Innocent until guilty and all that," Alana says with a soft smile that melts all the anger in his bitter heart.

He's being unfair. The girl's not even awake yet and he's already punishing her for something she doesn't even know she's done. Is doing. Is being alive considered doing something? He sighs.

Alana mentions the article that Freddie Lounds wrote, something about him being a killer. Will enjoys talking to her. She's so fun and curious. In a different life, he thinks they could be friends, finding out everyone's secrets and sharing them with each other. She likes to write things about him on the internet that makes him utterly, wonderfully human. Jack has been hounding him on getting a restraining order to get her away from him.

Speaking of which, "Did Jack send you?" Will asks. Jack worries about him so much. It would be kind of sweet if it wasn't absolutely annoying. He has to be careful even out of work to make sure that his disguise isn't seen though. Then again, people these days are so quick to dismiss the supernatural that he doubts anyone would believe Jack if he figures out the truth.

"No, I sent me," Alana says with a fond smile.

Will melts a little. He's not even annoyed when she does the same thing Hannibal does and talk psychology to him.

"'I don't need to talk about it if you don't," she says, graciously offering him an opportunity to not talk about something else for a change.

"We cant talk about whatever you want," he grins. "Actually, I was just enjoying listening you read."

"Abigail Hobbs is a success for you."

Oh, so even Alana wants to talk about Abigail now? What's so special about her that everyone wants to talk about her all the time? He glares at the girl, and then he sees the bandage around her neck and reminds himself that she would probably die from her wounds eventually, so he decides to be better. "She doesn't look like a success."

"Don't feel sorry for yourself because you saved this girl's life."

"I don't," he responds without thinking. "I feel..." Annoyed? That's not a good answer, is it? He settles on, "I feel good." He hopes she doesn't make it through the night.

...

When he levels her gun at the man who's buried all those bodies in the forest, he considers letting the man kill Abigail Hobbs. It seems like a good ending for the poor girl, and selfishly, Will is tired of everyone talking to him about her and how he feels about her. He really doesn't care about her at all except that she's taking attention away from Hannibal.

He shoots the man instead. In his heart, he thinks of the man's death as a sacrifice to the forest. Heavens know it needs all the sacrifices it can get to keep itself alive. Humans keep taking and taking without giving anything back. Poor mushroom man who just wants to belong. He wonders if they would bury him in the forest. Maybe he would plant mushrooms on his grave. The forest would like that.

Jack is understandably pissed that he went for the kill-shot. He has questions that he wants answers to and he won't be getting them. One good thing comes out of the encounter, however. He gets to talk to Hannibal again, though he insists in talking in riddles and confusing everyone.

Will spends the majority of the session staring at the doctor's lips and wondering how he would taste, if there would be remnants of perfectly seared human bacon at the corner of his lips if he kissed him. It's an odd thought. Will has never been a particularly sexual creature before. He knows about sex and knows that it's necessary to have children, but his only experience with it was years and years ago with Death, and he thinks it's not entirely consensual on his part on account on him being dead and all. He was still a fox then. He has a feeling it would be different now that he's human, but he's not curious enough about it to try. Mostly, he's curious about his boy and how much he's changed. Except being curious in his boy is making him curious about other things too, like how his body feels better whenever his boy gets closer to him, and that odd tightness in his gut that tells him to close the distance between them.

He ignores most of that.

Hannibal is intrigued by Will, or his human shell, that much is clear. The more time Will spends with him, the more curious he gets. He wants to see what Hannibal will do if he doesn't reveal his true nature to him. Would Hannibal kill him? He doesn't really mind.

He has lives to spare.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry for the delay! I promise I'm still working on this and I have an idea where it's going. I'm jumping around and writing parts in the middle instead of linearly, but I'll get the story in order eventually! Thank you for all the kudos and comments. You guys are the best! T.T

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He really shouldn't be annoyed that the girl has woken up instead of dying like he'd hoped, but he is. He is also glad that he doesn't have to face her alone. Hannibal is there.

And so is the reporter who keeps writing about him. He wonders if she's working on another article about him then, but when he hears parts of the conversation where Freddie tells the girl: "What you remember, what you tell everyone is going to define the rest of your life. Let me help you." And he knows that even Freddie Lounds is in love with the girl.

He sighs. Everybody wants to talk about Abigail Hobbs. Maybe they should all marry her and he is better off going home to his forest, where he's actually wanted.

Hannibal glares at the redhead and asks her to leave the room right as she calls Will 'unstable'. He kind of wishes she's stayed longer so she can put more labels on him. She simplifies all his diagnosis in easily readable chunks and he's grateful for them. 'Unstable' is easier to project than 'too many mirror neuroses' and the psycho-babble that those professionals keep throwing at him just gives him headaches when he tries to understand them.

She writes them in such simple terms and he loves her a little.

The girl looks up and instantly her gaze lands on Will. He flinches and tries not to look completely guilty. Does she know he's been praying for her to die. Did *Death* snitch on him?

"Abigail, this is Dr. Lecter. Do you remember us?" he says, trying to get her to focus on someone else.

"I remember you," she says. "You killed my dad."

Will keeps his face carefully neutral as he prays for her to choke on her own tongue and suffocate. *Oh, that ungrateful little-*

"You've been in bed for days, Abigail. Why don't we have a walk?" Hannibal intercepts, graciously offering Will an out.

Will turns to his cannibal with a thankful smile, but then he sees the amused quirk of a smile on his face and he frowns instead. Hannibal is enjoying this too much.

She turns to Hannibal with a most peculiar look that makes all the hair on his arm rise. He has to swallow the growl bubbling in his gut before it escapes. Oh, how he despises the girl. "I'm sorry we couldn't save your mother," Will's mouth says instead. "We did everything we could, but she was already gone." *Wish the same thing had happened to you*, he thinks vindictively.

"I know. I saw him kill her," she says. "He was loving right up until the second he wasn't. Kept telling me he was sorry, to just hold still."

Oh, Will thinks sadly. That must've been truly awful for her. Will stops feeling upset with her and feels bad for her instead. It's not that hard to do. He's not completely heartless. "There was plenty wrong with your father, Abigail," he says, carefully choosing his words so he doesn't give away too much. "But there's nothing wrong with you." Survival is a good thing. She did what she had to in order to survive.

Comprehension doesn't dawn on her face when he says this. She doesn't know that he's figured out her part in his father's murders. Right now, she's looking at him with such open hope and adoration that he can't help but feel slightly nurturing towards her.

He sighs. "You say he was loving. I believe it. That's what you brought out in him."

"It's not all I brought out in him. I'm gonna be messed up, aren't I? I'm worried about the nightmares."

"We'll help you with the nightmares."

Will glances at Hannibal incredulously when he says this. Help as in increase the nightmares, or make it go away? Most importantly, why hadn't Hannibal offered the same help to Will? "I worry about nightmares too," he says petulantly.

"I wanna go home," the girl says, equally, if not more petulant.

Will nods. He hopes she goes home too. And stays there.

...

For some reason, they ended up going to Abigail's home together with Hannibal and Alana, so his initial plan of 'accidentally' leaving her in her home is no longer viable.

He sulks the whole way there.

To make matters worse, Alana and Hannibal are both painfully kind to her, treating her with kid's gloves as though she is a child. She hasn't been a child for a long time.

Alana offers her a way out the moment they step into her house, telling her that they can leave if she ever feels overwhelmed. Will wonders if it's possible for a person to die from being treated with too much kindness and wishes it is.

He asks her about the phone call because it's been bugging him for a while. It seems too coincidental, that a call would come to the house just before he arrives and then Hobbs would know to panic.

"It was a blocked call," he tells Abigail. "Did you recognize his voice?"

"I had never heard it before," she says, lying through her teeth. She hasn't been doing it long enough for it to be perfect. She's heard it before.

He tries to get her to talk, but is met by dead ends and he just wants to grab her by her shoulders and shake her until she tells the truth. As fun as puzzles are, it's frustrating when they don't want to let him know when he's gotten it right.

"Is that why you let me come home? To find evidence?"

"It was one of many considerations," Hannibal divulges.

"Are we going to re-enact the crime? You be my dad," she glances at Will, and then Alana, "You be my mom." Then, she gives Hannibal the oddest look, "And you be the man on the phone."

Will feels the last piece of the puzzle click into place. Oh, fucking, *fucking Hannibal.* One of these days, he's going to sink his teeth into his arrogant cheek and chew until he stops being such an *asshole*.

And just like that, Abigail is suddenly a loose end that can't be allowed to live, not if Will wants to keep his stupid cannibal safe.

"Abigail, we wanted you to come home to help you leave home behind," Alana says kindly. Will hopes kind, gentle Alana isn't not attached the girl yet. He's going to get rid of her soon.

"You're not gonna find any of those girls, you know?" she says.

"What makes you say that?"

"He would honor every part of them. He used to make plumbing putty out of elk's bones. Whatever bones are left of those girls are probably holding pipes together."

That's ingenious. He's impressed and horrified at the same time. He steals a glance at his cannibal.

Hannibal looks inspired. "Where did he make this putty?" Hannibal asks as if he's asking for the recipe and all the equipment needed so he can replicate the entire process.

"At the cabin," the girl says. "I can show you tomorrow."

Will wants to ask if she will show them right now, and then maybe he can distract the two and magic her away or something. It has been a while since he's used magic on something other than himself, but he's fairly sure he can turn her into something small and utterly unlovable.

"Abigail, there's someone here," Alana says, and then they're introduced to Marissa and Nicholas Boyle.

He turns to them and has to blink away the darkness around them before he actually sees them at all.

Sometimes, the magic is strong enough in the air and in Will that he can glimpse into the future. Nothing is ever clear, but just enough that he knows what's going to happen. He looks

at both Marissa and Nicholas Boyle and he knows that they don't have long to live. It is so clear that he wonders if his magic is getting stronger. It's odd because if anything, he should be getting weaker.

The further he strays away from the forest, the weaker he should get, but he is stronger, his magic singing to him as it has never done before.

He should be happy for the extra boost in magic. Instead, he is wary. He has not been spending more time in the forests, has not been practicing his magic as he should. In fact, he has not been a very good fox at all for a long time.

He should not be stronger.

But he is.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry for the delay in postings. Thank you so much for all your kudos and comments. I have a few more chapters drafted and try and be more consistent going forward. I love you all. Stay strong, stay safe.

Chapter 8

A pendulum swings in the darkness of Will's mind, keeping rhythm with his heart beat.

Left.

Right.

Left.

His eyes close and the pendulum arches grimly in front of a family dinner, the dead family seated at the table with a rotting pot roast set in the middle. A pendulum swings and decay disappears from the scent. Aromatic steam now rises from the roast as though it had been set down just moments before.

Right.

The pendulum swings across the table and the pool of blood in front of Mr.s Turner shrinks and recedes back towards her head.

Left.

The pendulum swings again and the Turners slowly sit up one by one, life returning back to their bodies as though they were not dead mere seconds before.

Right.

Will sits a the head of the table. His magic is getting stronger. He had not been able to see so clearly before and the fact that he is nags the back of his mind but he doesn't want to think about it now.

He tells Jack the things he sees, the scent of blood clinging to the back of his throat, thinking, wondering why he's able to see so clearly at all.

Somewhere, he can fell his possessions being misplaced, an intruder in his home, touching his things.

He wants to leave and find out who's in his home, but he refrains. He needs to figure out what happened here. He looks at the clues and sees all the things he shouldn't. It is not just deduction now, not just all his experience living. He used to see things through the eyes of someone who has long since tired of it, able to connect the dots because he has seen it all before.

But now, now he sees what is, unhindered by lies. He sees the truth.

And then, he reaches home and sees that Hannibal has been in his home, completed his salmon fly, expertly using the tools of his hobby, thread, bobbin, scissors, pliers. His boy is

exceptional in his work. And then he pricks himself, deliberately on the pointed barb, giving Will a full scent of his blood.

His boy has been touching his things, leaving his scent on his things.

He grins, pleased.

...

"Tell me about your mother," his boy requests, demands, really.

"That's some lazy psychiatry, Dr. Lecter. Low hanging fruit," he says. Will is still riding the high of having found his boy touching his things, bribing his pets with human food. Heh. *Human* food. He wonders if there is a way to bring it up, maybe mention something about having a security camera.

"I suspect that fruit is on a high branch, very difficult to reach," Hannibal says, looking so very amused with himself.

"So's my mother. I never knew her," Will says because it's true. Some days, he feels like he had sprouted from a plant.

"An interesting place to start," Hannibal says.

"Tell me about your mother. Let's start there. Quid pro quo," he says.

His boy looks immeasurably pleased by his use of Latin. If only he knew how many languages Will is actually capable of. His boy says, "Both my parents died when I was very young. The proverbial orphan until I was adopted by my Uncle Robertas when I was 16."

Adopted. That's what he's calling it now? Stolen. Kidnapped. *Abandoned.* **Uncle Robertas**. He breathes in deep through flared nostrils and considers hunting him down now that he has a name. He would tear into the man's neck with his fangs and chew through his arteries. He would-

Hannibal is waiting for him to say something smart.

"There's something so foreign about family. Like an ill-fitting suit. Never connected to the concept." The thief who stole Hannibal from him did it because he thought he was Hannibal's family. Hannibal is *his* family. Hannibal would have been fine with him. They would have kept each other warm and happy.

"You've created a family for yourself," he says.

Will blinks, surprised. Has his boy seen through him? And then there's that little amused smile, the image of Hannibal feeding his dogs fills his mind. *Oh*. He's talking about the dogs. "I created a pack of strays. thanks for feeding them while I was away," he says carefully, wondering if his boy can see what he means.

He doesn't. "I was referring to Abigail Hobbs."

Oh yes, that loose thread. He will have to get rid of her soon, before she turns into a problem.

...

He is the one to find the boy, the frightened young thing with a woman who believes herself a mother. There is something wrong with her- something wrong with the young boy.

He kneels on the ground and begs the boy to put the gun down.

Chris shuffles on his feet, eyes welling. He knows he's not going to shoot him.

The woman has a gun in her hand but it's at the back of Christopher's spine. The boy smells anxious, terrified. He smells so much like prey in the moment that he wonders how a predator has not found the scent and jumped out of the shrubs to lunge at his neck. The weak doesn't survive very long out in the wild.

The woman is strong, but in all the wrong ways. "Shoot him, Christopher," she goads. "Shoot him for me."

He locks gazes with the older woman. "You're his new mother."

"I am. And I love him. But I will do what I have to for my family."

It is not a family at all.

There is loud sound of gun going off, so immediate and unexpected that he checks his stomach to see where the bullet hit, only to find that he has not been shot at all.

Beverly usurps Jack in his list of favorite people as she moves in and guides Chris away.

He crosses to fallen Eva on the ground, watching as she takes sharp breaths, tensing through the pain. Death appears again, her fingers cold and gentle on Will's cheek.

She does not say anything to him this time, merely does her job and disappear into the air with a ghost of a kiss on his cheek.

Chapter Nine

Chapter Summary

"You know where you are, Mr. Graham?"

Evidently, he is not dreaming. He shakes his head, blinking the confusion out of his eyes and says bluntly, "No."

"Where do you live?"

"Wolf Trap, Virginia."

"We're in Wolf Trap. So that's good. You're close to home. Is that yours?" he flashes the light at the giant stag trailing behind him, guiding him home, but it's not a ravenstag.

"Hey, Winston," he smiles despite himself, pleased by the illusion. He is not the only one learning new tricks. It seems- "Oh," he startles, surprised when Winston touches its nose to his hand. It really is Winston. Did he do this?

Come home, Will.

The black stag slowly lumbers down the vacant rural road, guiding him towards somewhere that is calling out to him like a beacon. His head burns with knowledge and power that is not his own. He is clad in boxers and a white t-shirt, coming directly from the bed. He doesn't have shoes on and his feet touches the gravel without pain.

This is familiar. He has never been fond of shoes.

He looks up at the bright moon overhead, his heart beating in his ears, blood thrumming in his veins. There is something wrong with this.

He is dreaming. He is-

Come home.

He stops, swaying ever so slightly at his ankles. The black stag slows to a stop behind him, it's snout warm as it nudges his arm, prompting him to keep moving onward. "You've never done this before," he hums, turning to the beast slightly. The forest wants him home, but it has never manifested so clearly to him, never took advantage of his weakened state to bring him back.

Come home, Will.

The boy is not good for you.

That's not true. "I'll come home once I have him," he says unconvincingly. He doesn't have a solid plan to bring his boy back. He doesn't even have a plan to reveal himself to him. All the convoluted games have complicated things and he is too curious not to see how things will play out.

A bright light is shone in his face and he holds up his arm instinctively to shield his eyes from the glare. He blinks, confused by what he's seeing, so certain that he is in a dream that he is surprised to see others in it.

Two police officers step out of either side of a police car, looking concerned, but careful.

"Are you lost?"

"What?" he gapes at the man, wondering if he is merely another illusion that the forest has brought out confuse him.

"What's your name?"

Ah, the forest would never ask him that. Names don't matter to it. The other man glances into the forest, where, if he focuses, he would probably see trees reaching towards them, trying to swallow them whole. "Will Graham," he says.

"You know where you are, Mr. Graham?"

Evidently, he is not dreaming. He shakes his head, blinking the confusion out of his eyes and says bluntly, "No."

"Where do you live?"

"Wolf Trap, Virginia."

"We're in Wolf Trap. So that's good. You're close to home. Is that yours?" he flashes the light at the giant stag trailing behind him, guiding him home, but it's not a ravenstag.

"Hey, Winston," he smiles despite himself, pleased by the illusion. He is not the only one learning new tricks. It seems- "Oh," he startles, surprised when Winston touches its nose to his hand. It really is Winston. Did he do this? His magic is capable of defending him without him having to think of it at times, making sure that his human suit is kept intact. He has never magicked something from somewhere else like this, though, not without preparation, not without having to prepare a hearty sacrifice prior.

He answer the police officer without thinking too hard about the questions, more intent on making sure that Winston is alright. He's a sweet boy, nuzzling up to him and licking his wounds and his face, doing his best to make sure that Will is also alright.

Winston is fine.

He's not so sure about himself.

He goes to find Hannibal, trying to find something familiar to cling to. He has never felt like this before, untethered, adrift. Perhaps the forest is right. He has stayed away for too long and needs to return.

He lets the nice officers drive him home and drives himself to Hannibal, a myriad of question in his head, the forefront of which is 'will you come home with me?'. Instead, he watches him work on the vacuum coffee maker and licks his lips, admiring his boy in his terrible bathrobe with colors that doesn't seem like they're meant to be together, having been roused from sleep.

"I'm sorry it's so early," he finds himself saying, though he doesn't feel sorry at all, really. His boy looks rather sweet, out of his peacocking suits.

"Never apologize for coming to me," Hannibal says, smelling pleased as punch as he prepares a fancy cup of coffee for him.

His boy makes amazing coffee. He has to focus on not downing everything at once. "Could it be a seizure?" he asks.

"I'd argue good old-fashioned post traumatic stress. Jack Crawford has gotten your hands very dirty."

"Wasn't forced back into the field," he hums, taking another sip, thinking of telling the truth, telling him that Hannibal is the reason that he's here at all. He's here to bring him home. It is as good an opening as it can be, but he wants to see what other games his boy has for him.

"I wouldn't say forced. Manipulated would be the word I'd choose."

His hackles rises. He's the one who does the manipulating. He's a fox, after all. "I can handle it," he says through clenched teeth, unhappy by the suggestion that he can't. He can handle being human. How hard can it be?

"Somewhere between denying horrible events and calling them out lies the truth of psychological trauma."

"So I can't handle it?" he asks. It isn't psychological trauma. Then again, he has never put on a human skin for so long before. Maybe he is beginning to unravel at the seams.

"Your experience may have overwhelmed ordinary functions that give you a sense of control."

That- that actually makes sense. His human suit is falling apart because there are too many ways to tug it free, it is so different from being in his natural skin, after all. He has to be careful to keep everything inside, to be contained and human. "You said Jack sees me as fine china used for special guests. Beginning to feel more like an old mug," he mumbles, his mouth moving without permission, his human suit taking over his internal thoughts, moving and talking when he feels like hiding inwards more and more, where it is warm and comforting.

"You entered into a Devil's Bargain with Jack Crawford. Takes a toll."

He scoffs. "Jack's not the devil." He would know.

"When it comes to how far he's willing to push you to get what he wants, Jack's certainly no saint."

But then, neither is his boy when it comes to the things he want. How perfectly his boy wears his human suit. Perhaps he should be taking notes.

...

He works with Jack Crawford to catch the man whose brain is betraying him, burning to crisp from the inside, the man who makes angels to watch over him while he sleeps.

He is so afraid of Death. Will wishes he could tell the man that there is no need to be afraid at all, but he would be lying. He clings to all of his tails, reluctant to part with a single one because he's so frightened of drying.

He finds an excuse to visit his boy again. Hannibal picks up a book on neurology and drops it down from the second floor to him. He catches it and opens it up to a random page, his lips moving, sharing what should probably be confidential information to Hannibal about the case. Jack probably signed some sort of non-disclosure agreement with him. The man trusts Hannibal too much, honestly. Poor Jack, trusting all the people he shouldn't.

"He feels abandoned," Will says. He knows how that feels intimately.

"Ever feel abandoned, Will?"

Will's hackles rise. If he had his tails, they would all be puffed up to show his displeasure. "Abandonment requires expectations," he says, keeping his gaze averted as he remembers all the days he has spent waiting in that abandoned castle, keeping himself warm and starving as he waits for his boy to return. Yes, he knows what abandonment feels like very intimately.

"What were your expectations of Jack Crawford and the F.B.I."

He snaps the book shut. "Jack hasn't abandoned me," he says. Not like you have, he thinks angrily, chewing on the inside of his cheek, biting hard enough to draw blood.

"Not in any discernible way. Perhaps in the way Gods abandon their creations."

He leans back against the table. "Well, this should be interesting," he chuckles. Did he think himself a god when he abandoned Will, all those years ago? "Please proceed, Doctor."

"Jack gave you his word he would protect your head space. Yet, he leaves you to your mental devices."

You gave me your word you would return. Yet, you left me alone for years, in a home that you no longer care for. "Are you trying to alienate me from Jack Crawford?" he frowns, seeing through the carefully woven lies.

"I'm trying to help you understand this Angel Maker you seek."

They resume talking about the poor man and Will continues to be distracted by his own thoughts, but things changing inside of him that he doesn't understand.

...

He figures out there's something wrong with Jack's wife before he does. He takes a whiff of the man when he comes into work that morning and smells the sickness and death lingering to him. His wife is dying and he either has no idea, or he doesn't *care*.

Or perhaps it is Hannibal getting in his head.

He begins to wonder if Hannibal is right. Jack is obsessed with his job, with getting things done and closing cases. Would he care if Will Graham breaks? He wonders Jack is abandoning him.

He loses his temper with Jack. "You're the head of the Behavioral Science Unit, Jack. Why don't you come up with your own answers if you don't like mine."

A stillness washes over everyone. Jack locks Will with a cold stare.

He takes off his glasses, putting on his suit, reminding himself that there's a hierarchy here. He doesn't work with Jack. He works *for* Jack.

Maybe they aren't friends at all.

He steps away and looks up at the man the Angel maker has strung up. He wonders if the man they are hunting is a man at all, or another creature like him who has lost its way.

Perhaps it had clung to it's human skin too tightly and gone mad in the process.

Is that what's happening to him?

He stands between the corpses of Mr. and Mrs. Anderson as alone in the work bay as he is in his own head. Beverly enters and leans on the morgue drawer, studying him.

"I've never seen anybody talk to Jack the way you talked to Jack."

He is losing control of everything around him without even trying to. It is a unique situation for him to be in. Foxes are usually the ones causing chaos, not be it. Perhaps it is one and the same. He has never been one for games. "I was out of line," he says, trying to come across as remorseful.

"You were out of your mind. My ears rang like they did the first time I heard my mom say the f-word," she says with a hint of smile on her face, looking at him with kindness. "Are you okay? I know it's a stupid thing to ask considering that none of us could possibly be okay doing what we do. But are you okay?"

He doesn't feel okay. He blinks and he is at a different place where he began and things have been done that he doesn't remember. "Do I seem different?" he asks.

"You're a little different. You've always been a little different. Brilliant strategy. No one knows when there's something up with you."

Thank you. "How would I know if there was something up with you?" he counters.

"You wouldn't. But I would tell you if you asked me. Return the favor?"

Beverly wears kindness so easily. Perhaps she thinks of him as her friend. He would like someone like her as his friend. Beverly wouldn't toy with her the way Hannibal seems to be toying with him and she wouldn't ask him to keep looking into the abyss the way Jack is.

Sometimes, he worries that he would bring something back.

Perhaps he has brought something back already, a darker magic clawing out from the darkness, reaching out to grasp his hand in return.

He is-

He is losing time.

He blinks the night away and wakes in the morning standing on the roof through the open window he apparently crawled through, his dogs barking at him to return to safety.

He is losing time and he has a headache that shouldn't be there at all.

In Hannibal's office, he sees the raven stag that the forest has taken the form of. Where did he get this? It has to be another illusion. He reaches out and touches it, feels it with his hand. It's cold. It's solid.

Hannibal spews psychobabble at him and he responds without consideration, words coming out of his human suit that has been so carefully constructed that it has begun to grow. Would it keep moving if he separated from it, he wonders.

He feels Hannibal moving behind him, his nostrils flaring as he inhales in deep.

"Did you just smell me?" he twists a little, a smile gracing the corner of his lips, amused, present in a way that he hasn't been for a long time.

"Difficult to avoid. I really must introduce you to a finer aftershave. That smells like something with a ship on the bottle."

It is something with a ship on the bottle. He likes the ship. It's big and solid and he wants to own a ship himself. Maybe he'll steal one. "I keep getting it for Christmas," he lies.

He doesn't look convinced. "Have your headaches gotten any worse lately? More frequent?"

He- how does he know that? He-

Fucking hell.

Is his boy *poisoning* him?

Is that what's wrong with his body?

"Yes, actually," he confesses, already doing a check of his human body, making sure everything is working as it should be, but he's finding it harder and harder to reach inwards, to actually get to the part of him that's him and separate the parts that aren't.

"I would change the aftershave."

His boy is *such* an asshole.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!